POSITION OF WOMEN

C. G. 562 The position of women in the Caucasus was in many respects subordinate to that of men: male children were preferred, descent was patrilineal, residence patrilocal, women were excluded from inheritance rights; in case the headwoman was unable to reconcile a quarrel among the female members of the family, the case was put before the headman; divorces C G [684] were in general more easily obtained by men than by women, and in the case of adultery the husband had the right to kill or disfigure his wife. The Circassian code of behavior forbade women to sit down while men were standing, and the husband was addressed in terms of respect by his wife. In most areas the women C G [762] led a life of hard work; besides doing the housework, they also assisted in the work in the field, though certain activities such as tending horses and in most cases ploughing were performed by men only. Among the Georgian mountaineers, women were regarded from a religious point of view as unclean, and were forbidden to enter the walled precincts C. C. of the sanctuaries; the Svan had sexual avoid- [834] ance rules to ensure success in hunting expeditions; in Mingrelia a woman may not kill a chicken or animal she is going to prepare, as this would spoil the food.

562 695 peoples having a patriarchal organization, regardless of religion. We find it among the ancient Indo-European Slavs, Germans, and Ossetes.[28] (3) We also find it among non-Mohammedans of Caucasus.

After this lengthy degression we can offer a few examples to illustrate the relation of conjury to the unequal status of women. In Mugn District (Dargwa Province) women are not allowed to be conjurors. If less than 12 conjurors are required by any *adat*, not only must all conjurors be *male* relatives, but relatives of the *father*.[29] In Hyuraki District[30] and elsewhere[31] female relatives may participate in the conjury only if they are necessary to complete the required number of 40.[32]

[682] The inferior position of the female sex is further expressed in the *adats* determining the amount of bloodwite. Sometimes, it is true, no distinction is made whether a man or a woman is the victim,[33] but sometimes a definite distinction *is* made. The Kurins, for instance, have an established bloodwite of Rs. 250 for the death of a man and only Rs. 125 for the death of a woman.[34] The Ossetine bloodwite for the murder of a man is twice as high as that for a woman.[35]

§ 2. DIVISION OF LABOUR

462 The NORTHWESTERN CAUCASIANS. It is no longer true that all the work must be done by the female members of the family.[36] The men do the ploughing, woodchopping, hunting, and in general all the heavy work; the women do the usual housework, cook, wash, sew and mend clothes, and work in the garden.[37] Formerly, of course, the situation was quite different. The reports of the 18th and 19th century picture the Cherkess and the Abkhaz

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[28] Kovalevskij, *Coutume contemp.*, p. 460.

[29] "Adaty Darginskich Obščestv," p. 60. For *adats* of the Trudakhar District, see "Adaty Darginskich Obščestv," pp. 111 f.

[30] "Adaty Darginskich Obščestv," p. 84.

[31] "Adaty Darginskich Obščestv," p. 71.

[32] If there are still not enough conjurors, the oath must be repeated till the required number of oaths is reached. ("Adaty Darginskich Obščestv," p. 84.)

[33] "Adaty Južno-Dagestanskich Obščestv," SSKG, VIII (1875), p. 47. When we use the words "crime" and "murder" we understand them in the sense of the *adats*. To be more exact we should rather say "damage" and "homicide." Customary law is not interested in *guilt*. It aims to repair damages done to the family and sib, whether that damage be intentional or accidental. If a horse accidentally kicks and kills a passer-by, both the rider and the owner of the horse become blood-enemies of the victim's sib (Leontovič, II, pp. 45 ff). Since customary law is not interested in guilt, it is not interested in *punishing*. It aims to *repair* the damages, hence it matters little whether the "criminal" himself or another member of his family or sib is "punished."

[34] "Adaty Južno-Dagestanskich Obščestv," p. 7.

[35] Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, i, p. 340.
The position of the female sex in Khevsuria is somewhat better than elsewhere in the mountains (Požidaev, 106 f). She may even take her meals with her husband (Požidaev, *Gorcy severnogo Kavkaza*, p. 107). The Kumyks allow their wives more rights than are granted to women by the *adats* of the true Caucasians (Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, ii, p. 639).

[36] Ladyženskij, FT, pp. 199 f.

[37] Ladyženskij, FT, p. 201.

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menfolk as gentlemen of leisure, the women bearing the burden of the family work practically by themselves.[38]

The NORTHEASTERN CAUCASIANS. Practically all the work in the house and in the field is done by the women, while the men usually just stand idly by. The tasks done by the men are generally only seasonal, such as hay-cutting, woodchopping, and ploughing. The women, on the other hand, must slave day after day, doing very strenuous work. And even when they have finished their work out in the field and their other chores, they are kept busy sewing and mending clothes, etc. In a word, life in Chechnia and Ingushetia is that of busy bees and lazy drones.[39] Of course, today there is a marked improvement in the position of the female sex. Even if we allow for the frequent exaggeration of pre-Soviet explorers and *adat* collectors, we cannot deny that the Ingush women were obliged to bear a terribly disproportionate share of the family work. In "The Collection of *Adats* for the Ingush Province of the 1860's" we read: "Only very recently the natives of the Ingush Province, according to an ancient custom, considered the woman a work-animal, a 'thing,' not a being possessing human personality."[40] Vertepov in his monograph on the Ingushi attributes the disproportion in the Ingush sex ratio to the disproportionate division of work. His supposition is confirmed by the fact that the Ingushi of the plains have a much more equal division of labour and at the same time the sex ratio is much more normal.

TABLE 17

Ingush Sex Ratio (Vertepov, "Inguši," **Terskij Sbornik**, II [1892], No. 2, p. 99)

Location	Male	Female	Sex Ratio
Mountains	53.5%	46.5%	115 : 100
Lowlands	51.2%	48.8%	104.9 : 100

The mountaineers of Daghestan belong to the same class of "idlers" as the other North Caucasians.[41] The Avar women must carry loads of wood and hay sometimes from great distances, while the men only idle their time away. Women carry as much as 120 pounds (three *puds*) at a time.[42] L'vov has painted the lot

[38] Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, ii, p. 42.

[39] Baddeley, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 60, 93; Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, i, p. 437; R. Erckert, *Der Kaukasus*, p. 137; Engelhardt und Parrot, *Reise in die Krym und den Kaukasus*, I, p. 242; Klaproth, "Voyage au Mont Caucase," *Nouvelle Bibliotheque*, XI, p. 175.

[40] Leontovič, II, p. 169, § 115: "Elče ves'ma nedavno tuzemcy, naseljajuščie Ingulevskij okrug, po obyčaju dobrago starago vremeni smotreli na ženščin, kak na rabočij skot, sčitali ženščinu veščju, ne podozrevaja v nej nikakoj čelovečeskoj ličnosti."

[41] Cf. Omarov, "Kak živut Laki," SSKG, IV (1871), pp. 1—24, where find long detailed account of harvest and work out in field.

[42] Abercromby, *A Trip through the Eastern Caucasus*," p. 101.

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of the women of Avaria as a very miserable one indeed. A woman, he tells us, is regarded as nothing more than a "work-animal." The men prefer this sort of "domestic beast" because she can stand much more than a horse or an ox; the only difference between her and a domestic animal is that she eats bread while an animal is satisfied with hay.[43] An ideal wife in the eyes of the Avars is one that is robust and, above all, very diligent.[44] L'vov goes on to call the husband a "heartless tyrant." He may get himself a second wife and regard the first as his slave, and woe to this poor miserable slave-wife if she does not bear a child before the newcomer! Endless jeers and ridicule are all that she can expect! By moving into the house of her husband, she becomes a servant of her mother-in-law, who does only the easy jobs, leaving the disagreeable and difficult tasks to her daughter-in-law.[45] The Dido,[46] Botlikh,[47] Kaitago-Tabassaranians[48] and the other Lesghians do not differ from the Avars.[49] In Daghestan, "it is derogatory for a man to carry anything less dignified than a gun."[50] While the husband stands about and gossips at the local mosque or putters with his gun, the wife must slave from morn till night. The husband, of course, does the sowing, makes the hay, threshes, sheers the sheep, builds houses;[51] but these jobs are not sufficient to keep him busy all year round. The wife does most of the harvesting, and, as Sv ěčin puts it, "brings half of the grain on her shoulders, leaving the other half for the donkey."[52] She has to cut the grass for the animals, care for the horses, cook, weave, milk the cows, mind the children, do the usual housework, set the cakes of cow-dung out to dry, clean the wool, spin, and fetch water.[53] Even the small girls of the family must take part in all these tasks. Frequently one can see nine- to ten-year-old girls carrying unbelievably heavy jugs of water, while boys as old as they, if not older, sit around and amuse themselves.[54]

The SOUTHERN CAUCASIANS. Among the Khevsurs[55] and the Svans[56] it is again the female sex that must bear practically the whole burden of family work.

The traveller will frequently witness the typically Caucasian scene "of women working and men loafing" also in OSSETIA.[57] The men do the plough-

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[43] L'vov, "Domašnjaja i semejnaja žizn Dagestanskich gorcev Avarskago plemeni," SSKG, III (1870), p. 11, *note*.
[44] L'vov, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
[45] L'vov, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
[46] Merzbacher, *Aus den Hochregionen des Kaukasus*, II, p. 455.
[47] Erckert, *op. cit.*, p. 284; K. N. Rossikov, "Poězdka v Čečnju i Nagornyj Dagestan," ZKO, XIII (1884), pp. 247.
[48] Amirov, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
[49] Amirov, "Sredi gorcev sěvernago Dagestana," SSKG, VII (1873), p. 48, claims that the Lak community of Batsa-Khari is an exception to this general rule.
[50] Abercromby, *op. cit.*, p. 174.
[51] Nansen, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
[52] Sv ěčin, "Očerk narodonaselenija, nravov i obyčaev Dagestancev," ZKO, II (1853), p. 63.
[53] Sv ěčin, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
[54] Sv ěčin, *l. c.*
[55] Eristov, "O Tušino-Pšavo-Chevsurskom Okrugě," ZKO, III (1855), p. 113.
[56] Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, ii, p. 109.
[57] Baddeley, *op. cit.*, I, p. 69.

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ing transporting and selling the produce, build houses, and do the heavy work; however, this is far from being a full-time employment. The women, on the contrary, are busy all day long: they must milk the cows, fetch water from the well and wood from the forest, and, of course, look after the children. If a man were ever to do any of these jobs, he would become the laughing-stock of the village.[58]

§ 3. SPECIAL RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES OF WOMEN

Despite all that we have said about the disadvantageous and even slavish condition of the woman in North Caucasia and neighbouring territory, the women enjoy certain rights and privileges which must not be overlooked. For example, throughout the Caucasus she alone is the *mistress* of the house.[59]

The NORTHWESTERN CAUCASIAN (as well as the Chechen), according to an *adat* of the Black Sea Line, Kuban and Terek Territories (§ 174), will permit no one to say anything unfavourable about his wife. The husband will tolerate an insult against his own father or mother, or even against himself, sooner than hear a single abusive word said against his wife.[60] When a daughter is married off into another sib the family does not lose all interest in her; on the contrary, it is this very interest that is her surest protection against ill-treatment. As we shall see in the following chapter, the husband who unjustly takes the life of his wife is infallibly avenged by her relatives. Moreover, the woman enjoys considerable freedom owing to the fact that her husband is frequently absent, either hunting or on a raid.[61] And even in the sixteenth century, as we read in G. B. Ramusio's *Raccolta di viaggi* (1583), the wife had a firm will of her own, which her husband usually respected. In a way, women are considered sacred: blood-vengeance will never take place before a woman,[62] and hence, she is an asylum like the sacred hearth-chain (*supra*, p. 127). The wife, or to be more exact, the mother of the household, is the sole mistress of the house and as such may arrange things within her little kingdom as she pleases and may even give orders to others.[63] In Abkhazia formerly a woman of a privileged class even had the right to preside at certain religious ceremonies, direct civil affairs, and be the leader in a raid.[64]

The NORTHEASTERN CAUCASIAN does not lose interest in his daughter after her marriage, and therefore he too compels her husband to

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[58] Cursin, *Osetini, etnograficeskij očerk*, p 39; Merzbacher, *op. cit.*, I, p. 204; see Hahn, "Fo dolinach Corvka, Urucha i Ardona," SMOMPK, XXV (1898), p. 32.

[59] Ladyženskij, "Zur Erforschung der Rechtsgewohnheiten der Bergvölker des Kaukasus," *Zeitsch. f. Ethnologie*, LXII (1930), p. 231.

[60] Leontovič, II, p. 254, § 175.

[61] Ladyženskij, FT, p. 201.

[62] Mourier, *Guide au Caucase*, I, p. 136.

[63] Castagné, "Le Droit coutumier familial des montagnards du Caucase," Révue des études islamiques, 1929, No. 2, p. 272.

[64] K. Mačavriani, "Někotoryja čerty iz žizni Abchazcev. Položenie ženščiny v Abchazii," SMOMPK, IV (1884), No. 2, p. 41; P. I. Kovalevskij, *Kavkaz, Narody Kavkaza*, pp. 34 f.